



# CAPTivations

## Success Stories in Prevention

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### *Southern Ute Community Action Program (CO)*

At Teen Court in Ignacio, Colorado, peers decide sentences for minor juvenile offenses. Teen Court not only holds young people more accountable for what they have done, the program has been featured on a video by the National Bar Association.

"The bar association was looking for one site each in an urban, suburban, and a rural site," explained Chris Hofmann, program administrator for the Southern Ute Community Action Program's youth prevention services, which runs Teen Court and a number of other prevention programs.

"They chose us as the rural site."

The Southern Ute Community Action Program, or SUCAP, began in the mid-1960s as a Head Start program, gaining its non-profit status in the 1970s. Over the years, the tribal service center has

added a senior citizen center, a substance abuse treatment center known as Peaceful Spirit, and other programs. It began its substance abuse prevention services in 1999.

SUCAP is located in Ignacio, a town of about 700 near Durango in LaPlata County in southwest Colorado. The county population is made up of about 40-45 percent European Americans, 30-35 percent Native American, and the remainder Hispanic.

"Our tri-ethnic community is both a strength and a weakness," Hofmann observes. "People get along, but there is a little more segregation, especially as kids get older. In kindergarten, kids don't care, but by sixth grade, kids are usually running around with their own ethnic group."

The economy is largely agrarian, with many people holding 8-5 jobs in one of the county's towns, then ranching at home. The Southern Ute Tribe is the largest employer, between the organization and the casino, with SUCAP itself employing 140 people. Durango also has a small college.

"This is a nice place to live," Hofmann said. "We're getting more people moving here from California and Texas. People are moving in with money. There's a lot of haves versus have nots here."

Based on what the Colorado Youth Survey data shows, youth in LaPlata County don't follow the usual patterns in gateway drugs—starting with cigarettes, then moving to alcohol, then to marijuana, then to harder drugs. Kids in LaPlata County might try cigarettes and marijuana the same year, and they might experiment with alcohol first before they try either cigarettes or marijuana, Hofmann said. And, kids in rural areas of the county are more hesitant to try alcohol than their in-town counterparts.

Many of the youth, particularly those from the rural areas, think fighting is the best way to resolve conflicts, Hofmann said. But, perhaps because of memories of the Columbine High School tragedy in their state, the kids also think the worst thing any of them can do is bring a gun to school.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Teen Court, which began five years ago, has been successful. Hofmann also points to the involvement of adults and to the professional setting

of the "courtroom" as reasons for its success.

Teen Court uses real judges, with teens acting as juries to determine sentencing. Only youth who plead guilty go before the juries. The crimes are usually minor: drinking, fights that don't lead to major injuries, truancy, and the like. Referrals to Teen Court come from the schools, Ignacio or tribal police departments, or the county sheriff's office.

Sentencing in

Teen Court usually involves community service and apology letters, though the severity of the letters often depends on the youth serving on the jury. Some juries, Hofmann said, require the offender to do a lot more writing than others. The offenses are usually wiped off the offenders' records much more quickly

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than in a regular court. However, though if the offenders do not follow through on their sentences, their cases are then referred to the local court.

The National Bar Association heard about the SUCAP's Teen Court program about a year ago, visited it, and chose it as its rural site for a video promotion on youth courts. The other sites were Baltimore and a suburb outside Salt Lake City. Hofmann notes that he found it interesting that they used actual tribal court rooms for their program, while Baltimore, another model site, didn't.

SUCAP also began a drop-in center for youth 10 years ago. It had an open-door policy, allowing youth to come in to play pool, read books, play video games and foosball, get a snack in the kitchen, or just hang out with friends. At times, the center would shut down so the adults could take the youth bowling, swimming, or to other activities in the community.

In recent years, the center has switched its focus to more structured activities, as funders have become concerned that drop-in centers can become places where youth can meet to sell drugs. That was not a problem at SUCAP's drop in center, Hofmann notes, because the coordinator had zero-tolerance for such activities, but the organization still needed to conform to the wishes of its funders. Now youth go to the center for specific activities, such as swimming, bowling, bike riding, dances, and so forth.



Besides the drop-in center, SUCAP also runs an after-school program. It's called "Latch-Key Program," but it's really an anti-latch-key program, because it's a safe alternative for kids in grades kindergarten through three to go after school, so they're not getting in trouble at home if their parents are gone at work. The 10 year old program, a cooperative effort of SUCAP, the town of

Ignacio, the Southern Ute tribe, and the school district, gives the kids a chance to do their homework, and gives them various activities for them to do.

To serve older kids in grades four through six, the After School Initiative, began in the spring of 2001. This program has various thematic units of study based on educator Howard Gardner's seven ways of measuring

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intelligence. Gardner believes young people have different areas of strength in intelligence: musical, artistic, logical-mathematical, verbal-linguistic, physical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.

For example, the kids in the After School Initiative completed a unit on birds. They

touched on each of the intelligence areas, doing such things as a nature walk to identify bird songs, and building bird houses.

The kids also complete units on substance abuse and their consequences, though the unit they were supposed to do in the fall of 2001 turned into a more patriotic lesson with the tragic events of Sept. 11. They worked together to make a banner showing their solidarity with the victims of the attacks.

SUCAP for the last three years has also run "Dare To Be You," a program started by the Colorado State University extension office in nearby Cortez, CO. Dare To Be You is a promising practice as defined by CSAP, and is especially useful for the Ignacio area population because it was designed with Mountain Ute and Navajo input, so it's not a mono-ethnic program.

Dare To Be You is a social-cognitive theory-based program, bringing in the whole family. The families meet once a week for a meal, family activities and break-out sessions, with parents meeting in one room and kids meeting by age in other rooms. Parents learn how to talk to their kids, discipline in positive ways, and how to talk to their kids about substance abuse.

The families meet for three 11-week sessions. As an incentive to get parents to attend, Hofmann said, families who attend 10 of the 11 sessions receive a \$200 stipend.

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### Resources:

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention  
[www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html](http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html)

Decision Support System  
[www.preventiondss.org](http://www.preventiondss.org)

Join Together  
[www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org)

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America  
[www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)

For this community success story and others from across the Southwest region, visit our website at <http://www.swcapt.org/products/success.html>